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EVANGELISTIC SERIES I.

Woman's Union Missionary Society.

A DAY WITH MISS MARY IRVINE.

BY MISS CAMILLE L. CLARKE.

WE left the Bridgman Memorial Home, Shanghai, China, in the morning, Miss Irvine, two Chinese Bible-women—in native costume, of course—and myself, for a day's itinerating in the country. We traveled two by two, in wheelbarrows, and I think I have rarely made one of a more novel and interesting party.

The wheelbarrow is soon a familiar sight in a city like Shanghai, where some five hundred men earn their livelihood by it, and where the thought is constantly suggested by their numbers that here at least the little man who "was forced to bring his wife home in a wheelbarrow" would not have lacked for companions in his dilemma. But though I had seen many wheelbarrows, this was my first ride in one, and I was speedily convinced that to do so with grace and comfort time and practice would be required. One can mount the vehicle much as one would a horse, sitting sidewise, and letting one foot rest in a kind of rope stirrup, which serves to mitigate the constant jar of the springless seat.

Our coolies were strong-looking men with pig-tails well tied up to be out of the way. A strap passing from handle to handle of the barrow served them as a kind of yoke, allowing the shoulders to share the burden with the arms. Thus they trundled us along the busy city thoroughfares until the river was reached, where from among the numberless clamoring boatmen one was selected who forthwith stowed us, wheelbarrow and all, on board, and began the leisurely process of propelling us to the farther shore. There was ample time to see the great Chinese junks moving slowly through the muddy waters of this outlet of the Yang-tse; to watch the picturesque crews at work, and the numberless brightly colored small craft, with a huge eye painted on each side of the prow; for, as the practical Chinaman says, "No have eye, how can see go?"

Once landed and a small village traversed, we found ourselves in the open country—and such a strange country as it was! As far as eye could reach, nothing but vegetable patches, with here and there the low, tiled roofs of farmhouses, and on all sides the land cut up and intersected by zigzag canals, along which meandered the narrow rutty track where no vehicle but the unpretending single-wheeled barrow could ever hope to travel in safety. As it was, we were quite willing to dismount at the rough places; a proceeding calling for extreme caution and perfect unity of action, as should one rider do so without giving due warning, the other might be subjected to a dipping in the black waters of the canal.

But the striking feature in the scene before us was the graves. Graves everywhere and anywhere in the midst of the vegetable patches, or in the farm enclosure itself; just wherever the priest or geomancer had pointed to the lucky burial spots, just there they had been made—those forlorn graves that give to every Chinese landscape its drearily unique aspect. They rose above us like miniature pyramids roughly thrown up, and covered with a coarse grass, where cattle graze undisturbed.

Still more dreary and gruesome was the sight of coffins placed here and there on the surface of the earth, quite uncovered, apparently uncared for and neglected. Yet in China more money is spent on the dead than upon the living, we were told. Doubtless many, if not all of these graves, had been made after long months of patient and costly waiting, while the geomancers, whose services are dearly bought, by charms and incantations discovered a spot where the departed could rest quietly, unmolested by the spirits of the winds and waters.

Through such a country we passed, from farm to farm. As soon as the inhabitants had news of the arrival of Miss Irvine and the Bible-women, the courtyard would fill as if by magic with an eager crowd, made up mostly of women, old and young, with babies in their arms and the little children hanging at their skirts, filled with a half-fearful curiosity to see the "light-haired barbarians."

We were everywhere received with courtesy and kindness. Usually a rough bench would be forthcoming, hurriedly brushed

off and placed for us against some friendly wall, for at Miss Irvine's clever suggestion we always sought a wall as background, thus preventing the crowd from completely surrounding us.

The first wave of curiosity having passed, and questions as to who we were, where from, and what our errand, being answered, all were ready to listen to the Gospel story. Although Miss Irvine's words were unintelligible to me, I found it deeply interesting to watch the various faces and varying expressions, and to follow the Bible-women, each absorbed in the group about her or talking earnestly to one inquirer alone. It was touching to remember that these Bible-women, now so eagerly striving to lead others to Christ, had themselves been brought from darkest heathenism into the glorious light and liberty of Christianity, and so could speak with deepest sympathy and directly to the hearts of these their sisters. Assuredly there was no lack of "open doors" that day, and Miss Irvine assured me it is so everywhere, even in the remote regions where she itinerates.

We found all willing to listen, and at each stopping-place some little incident of special interest occurred, impressing itself upon the memory. For example, the disappointed, questioning look of one who came too late, and the eagerness of a young woman who had heard all, as she begged Miss Irvine to repeat what had been said, to the late comer. At another time, it was in the house of a maker of paper money—silvery clusters hang-

ing all about us, and everywhere the signs and symbols of heathenism. I noticed, pressing close about us among the older listeners, some bright boys who were attracted by the books Miss Irvine had to sell. On being told the price of the coveted leaflets, one small head and then another disappeared from the group, returning shortly breathless but with the requisite *cash*, a coin equal to a fractional part of a cent, held tightly in his hand. Then such pleasure as was displayed in the sense of full possession! It was a surprise to find that many of these boys knew the characters well, and were eager to read and to learn.

And thus we followed Miss Irvine all day, from group to group, across the grave-covered fields, until the lengthening shadows warned us that it was time to turn our faces riverward once more. It was a day never to be forgotten—a day that brought all evangelistic work, and especially Miss Irvine's, out of the haze of things read about, into the clear outline of actual experience.

It is a most beautiful work that Miss Irvine is doing, and one for which her intense zeal and devotion especially fit her.

It is in the hope that she and those for whom she labors may be kept more constantly in the thoughts and prayers of all, that this imperfect glimpse of a day spent with her has been given.

THE WOMAN'S UNION MISSIONARY SOCIETY, under whose auspices this evangelistic work is conducted, was organized in 1860, and is the first association in this country whereby single women labor exclusively for heathen women; literally, *woman's mission to woman*. The work in China centres around the Bridgman Memorial School for Girls, and the Margaret Williamson Hospital for Women and Children, where thousands are treated yearly. Grateful patients whose health is restored, carry to their homes a love for the Great Physician, and prepare a ready reception for our two evangelists and native Christian Bible-women. To you who long to spread the love of Christ in the dark places of the East, we appeal for your interest and prayers.


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